

# THE CRANE WIND ENSEMBLE

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*Program Notes • Monday, 19 November 2018*

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## RUSSIAN FUNERAL

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*Benjamin Britten*

Benjamin Britten was a central figure in 20<sup>th</sup> century English music. Aware of his successes, Britten used his notoriety to further his personal causes: maintaining the viability of musical drama, audience outreach and perpetuation and music education, literacy and awareness.

Equally important to Britten was his accessibility as a composer. He eschewed modernist ideals in favor of a distinctive tonal language that resonated in a musical acceptance by professionals and amateurs alike. When surveying his works, one clearly notes that Britten's considerable opus spans the gamut of compositional mediums. Britten's entry in the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians contains this apropos description, "above all, [Britten] imbued his works with his own personal concerns... like his fiercely held pacifist beliefs, in ways that allowed people to sense the passion and conviction behind them even if unaware of their full implication."

*Russian Funeral*, Britten's only work for orchestral brass, was conceived and written in a remarkably short time-span. During the afternoon of February 24, 1936, Britten shaped the piece in his head; he sketched it before dinner on the 27th and delivered a full score to the copyists at his publishers, Boosey & Hawkes, before lunch on March 2. The work received its premiere on March 8 in a London Labour Choral Union concert at the Westminster Theatre.

In his 1936 diary, Britten refers to *Russian Funeral* as "War and Death," a title that expresses his lifelong pacifist leanings and sympathies, and as well references the original materials upon which *Russian Funeral* was drawn. This terse symphonic poem is tri-partite and draws on two themes ordered as follows "Death" - "War" - "Death."

Britten derives his "Death" theme, a broad funeral march reminiscent of Mahler, from a dirge entitled "You Fell in Battle," a Russian proletariat song glorifying those who gave their lives in the fight for the "life, liberty and happiness of the people." The dirge was performed and sung in funeral processions of those who died in the Winter Palace demonstration massacre of 1905, and later in the October Revolution of 1917. Britten orchestrates the first part of the melody for trombone, and the second for trumpets. The horns make a climactic entrance before the piece moves on to its next section.

In the faster second theme, "War," Britten borrows from the "Komsomol Fleet March." A bugle fanfare-like motive is foreshadowed at the end of the slow first section and is then spun out in several seven-beat trumpet phrases before migrating to the low brass. The low brass in turn states the melody at half speed

before a transition ensues to return the "Death" theme. The piece concludes with full statement of the dirge, which builds monumentally towards a final declamatory phrase.

## DUENDE: FOUR SYMPHONIC PRELUDES

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*Luis Serrano Alarcón*

The duende...Where is the duende?  
Through the empty archway a wind of spirit enters,  
blowing insistently over the heads of the dead,  
in search of new landscapes and unknown accents:  
a wind with the odour of a child's saliva, crushed grass,  
and medusa's veil, announcing the endless baptism,  
of freshly created things.

Federico García Lorca  
*Theory and Play of the Duende*, 1933

The term *duende* is used in flamenco to refer to this state of inspiration and supreme perceptiveness, almost magic, which is only reached by the performer in few occasions. It's also used, in extension, to define a person when someone has a special grace, something difficult to define but that makes him different from the rest.

The use of the work *Duende* as the title of this collection of symphonic preludes, independently of its poetic significance, is mainly based on the fact that I found my principal inspiration for the composition in the Spanish popular music. Listening to the piece, one can hear, among other features, the symphonic energy of de Falla's scores, the intimacy of *Iberia* by Albinez, the magic of the guitar played by Tomatito or Paco de Lucía, the festive happiness of Granadian Sacromonte (a popular flamenco neighborhood in Granada), but specifically – and I insist in this one – the obvious presence of winks to other musical styles, such as jazz or Latin music. With this style fusion, I want to reflect in a symbolic way where our Spanish society stands nowadays: a society with many traditions, but at the same time a cosmopolitan and modern community, which cannot be different in these modern times we are living.

*Note by Luis Serrano Alarcón*

## WORDS OF LOVE

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*James Mobberley*

Winner of the prestigious Rome Prize and a Guggenheim Fellow, composer James Mobberley received his MM in composition at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, studying with Roger Hannay. He earned his doctorate at the Cleveland Institute of Music, studying with Donald Erb and Eugene O'Brien.

Since 1983 Mobberley has been on the composition faculty of the Conservatory of Music at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. He serves as coordinator of the composition programs, and Director of the Musica Nova Ensemble.

*Words of Love* is written for soprano soloist and wind ensemble, and was commissioned by a consortium of wind band programs at the following schools: Arizona State University (Gary Hill), The Crane School of Music (Brian K. Doyle) and The UMKC School of Music (Steven Davis). Dedicated to his mother and father, James Mobberley comments upon his new work:

My father: wordsmith, philosopher, lover of learning; yet his most meaningful words were most often about the love of his life for sixty-one years. Near the end he lost his words, but not the love that inspired them. The texts, unpublished, are the work of my father, David Mobberley.

*My darling  
How do I love thee?  
The ways of love are countless –  
countless joys with which you bless my life.*

*Moments tender, sweet...*

*Moments tender,  
life's brimming overfull with love  
a vivid sunrise as successive days dawn,  
a knowing touch,  
a sensitive ear,  
a gentle answer,  
And when purple twilight falls about you,  
the beauty of a shared sunset.*

*Moments...  
as devotion fades into remembrance.  
Tender...sweet...*

*For years of love and life, I am, for all these things  
most grateful, darling,  
[always and forever.]*

*Note by James Mobberley*

## MUSIC FOR PRAGUE 1968

### *Karel Husa*

Karel Husa was born in Prague August 7, 1921. Although his mother, an amateur musician, fostered his appreciation of the arts as an avocation by insisting on violin, piano and painting lessons, the young Karel received formal schooling preparing him for a career in civil engineering.

As a result of the Nazi occupation of Prague in 1939 and the student protests that subsequently ensued, the Nazis closed all technical schools in Czechoslovakia, including the institute Husa prepared to attend. Conservatories of art and music, however, were not affected by this closure. Initially, Husa considered pursuing art, but finally settled on musical studies. After a period of private tutelage with composer Jaroslav Řidký, Husa gained acceptance into the Prague conservatory, studying composition and conducting from 1941-45. His student works, bearing the influences of Prokofiev and of fellow countrymen Josef Suk (a student of Antonin Dvořák) and Leoš Jánáček, received considerable attention and public praise. From 1945 to 1947, Husa attended the Academy of Musical Arts in

Prague. In the midst of his advanced studies, Husa received a fellowship through the French government to study in Paris with Arthur Honneger (composition) and Jean Fournet (conducting) at the École Normal de Musique.

After graduation from the Academy, Husa returned to Paris to study composition with Nadia Boulanger and conducting with Andre Cluytens. He also worked with conductor Eugene Bigot at the Paris Conservatory, where he audited Darius Milhaud's composition seminar. In 1948, Husa wrote his *First String Quartet*, which won the Lili Boulanger Prize in 1950 and set him on the road to international acclaim. That same year, Czechoslovakia became a communist state and proponents of the Avant Garde were exiled and their art banned. Even as music critics hailed Husa as "one of the greatest hopes for Czech music," the communist government revoked his passport, leaving him an exile. He would not set foot upon his native soil until after the end of the Cold War.

In 1954, musicologist Donald Jay Grout invited Husa to accept a faculty post at Cornell University and he remained there until his retirement 1992. Husa also served on the faculty of Ithaca College from 1967 to 1986. Teaching, as opposed to living as a traveling conductor, afforded Husa more time to compose, leading to a period of exceptionally fertile compositional endeavor.

For his compositions penned in the United States, Husa received significant praise including the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for his *String Quartet No. 3*, the first Louis Sudler Prize in 1983 for *Concerto for Wind Ensemble* and the 1993 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition for *Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra*. Perhaps his best known work, *Music for Prague 1968* has received over 7000 performances since its premiere in Washington D.C. at the Music Educators' National Convention. *Music for Prague 1968* was commissioned by the Ithaca College Band and composed during the summer and fall of 1968 for the capital city of Czechoslovakia.

As the composer states in the Forward to his work:

Three main ideas bind this composition together. The first and most important is the old Hussite song from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, "Ye Warriors of God and His Law," a symbol of resistance and hope for hundreds of years, whenever fate lay heavy on the Czech nation. It has been utilized by many composers, including Smetana in *My Country*. The beginning of this song is announced very softly in the first movement by the timpani and concludes in a strong unison (*Chorale*). The song is never used in its entirety.

The second idea is the sound of bells throughout; Prague, named also the City of "Hundreds of Towers," has used its magnificently sounding church bells as calls of distress as well as of victory.

The last idea is a motif of three chords appearing very softly under the piccolo solo at the beginning of the piece, in flutes, clarinets and horns. Later, it reappears at extremely strong dynamic levels, for example, in the middle of the *Aria*.

Different techniques of composing as well as orchestrating have been used in *Music for Prague 1968* and some new sounds explored, such as the percussion section in the *Interlude*, the ending of the work, etc. Much symbolism also appears: in addition to the distress calls in the first movement (*Fanfares*), the unbroken hope of the Hussite song, sound of bells, or the tragedy (*Aria*), there is also a bird call at the beginning (piccolo solo), symbol of the liberty which the city of Prague has seen for only moments during its thousand years of existence.